

Breaking Ground, Making History

*Jennings Judicial Center
Renovation and Expansion*

Wednesday, August 4, 2004

9 a.m.

Groundbreaking Ceremony

Greetings.....The Honorable Linda Q. Smyth
Fairfax County Supervisor, Providence District

Presentation of Colors Public Safety Honor Guard
Fairfax County

RemarksThe Honorable Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

RemarksThe Honorable Robert F. Lederer
Mayor, City of Fairfax

RemarksThe Honorable Michael P. McWeeny
Chief Judge, Fairfax County Circuit Court

Remarks Mr. David P. Bobzien
President, Virginia State Bar Association

Remarks Mr. Steven W. Ray
Vice President, Fairfax Bar Association

..... Break Ground

*Special thanks to Fairfax County
Circuit Court Archivist Sandra Rathbun for creating the
photo display that is here today.*

A History of the Courthouse

As ground is broken for the renovation and expansion of the judicial center, it is a good time to reflect on its rich history.

Fairfax County's first courthouse was originally located near present-day Tysons Corner when the county was created in 1742. The courthouse was relocated to Alexandria in 1752, before settling at the crossroads of Chain Bridge Road and the then-under-construction Little River Turnpike in 1800. The four acres of land that the colonial courthouse stands on today were sold to the county by Richard Radcliff for the sum of just one dollar.



The Fairfax Courthouse, 1863



Gazebo and Courthouse, 1920

With the court's arrival, the region instantly became the seat of county government and developed its own postal



Inside the Courthouse, 1920s

bly officially named the court's locality "Providence" in 1805.

district, named Fairfax Courthouse, on April 7, 1802. As the area began to develop into a local trading center, the General Assem-

During the development of Providence, the courthouse became a prominent site in the community. The addition of a jailhouse created a "Judicial Square," which later came to include the clerk's office and several attorneys' offices. When prosecuting criminals, the court could sentence the guilty party to be fined in pounds of tobacco, lashed at the gallows, or hung. The court, however, did not have jurisdiction in any capital cases involving whites. While capital cases involving slaves and free blacks could be held



Fairfax Clerk's Office, 1928

at the courthouse, capital cases involving whites were held in District Court in Richmond. Although criminal cases accounted for most of the activities at the court, other transactions included recording deeds and handling disputes regarding proposed roads and bridges. Even elections were held at the courthouse, although they were conducted by the sheriff.



Fairfax Clerk's Office, 1920s

The courthouse was also used as an annual auction house where owners would hire out their slaves and where free blacks could hire themselves out for wages. It was later the site of deliberations held to convince officials to withdraw Virginia from the Union and join other southern slave-holding states in the Civil War.

As the Confederacy begin to advance north during the start of the Civil War, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, met at the courthouse to discuss, and later reject, a proposal for the local encampment to invade the northern state of Maryland. Months later, a Union Cavalry raid in the area resulted in the loss of the first local Confederate officer of the Civil War, Captain John Quincy Marr.

Although both sides claimed victory in the skirmish, a short time later the courthouse became a Union encampment. On March 13, 1862, a group of Union corps commanders made the decision to advance on Richmond.

Ten years after the end of the war in 1875, the town of Providence was renamed the town of Fairfax. In 1887, the first telephone line was brought to the town, decreasing the time it took to spread news from the courthouse to other localities.

When not in use for official business, the courthouse space did not sit idle. It was used by organizations such as the Central Farmers Club. The first annual Farmers Institute and Exhibition was held at the site in 1891.

In addition, Judicial Square was host to a variety of activities such as circuses, tournaments, and even the occasional Quaker sermon.

In 1918, the courthouse



Fairfax Courthouse under restoration, 1966

was equipped with electric lights, then two years later, the central courtroom was refurbished. Due to lack of space, an addition was constructed onto the south end of the courthouse in 1929. A complete restoration of the courtroom followed in 1967, at a cost of \$90,000. In 1976, at the time of some minor renovations, a time capsule was buried next to the front wall of the courthouse that is scheduled to be opened in 2076. Later in 1976, the courthouse was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



*Dedication of the Jennings
Judicial Center, 1982*

In 1982, the three Fairfax County courts were forced to separate due to lack of space, moving both the Fairfax County Circuit Court and the General District Court to a new building on the other side of Judicial Square. The new building was named the Jennings Judicial

Center in honor of former Fairfax Circuit Court Chief Judge Barnard F. Jennings, who served 23 years at the bench and was the leading activist for the building of a new courthouse. The old courthouse still remains, housing the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court.

After over two centuries of active courtroom service, the old courthouse will become an administration building. With the groundbreaking



Jennings Judicial Center Courtroom 5E

today, the addition to the Jennings Building will provide enough space so the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court will be able to join the other two court groups when the addition is completed in late 2007.

The courthouse expansion construction project will add 316,000 square feet to the Jennings Judicial Center and partially renovate the existing building to include necessary security enhancements. The addition, comprised of 14 courtrooms, will be allocated to all three court groups, the bulk going to the newly moved Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. The addition will also include space for a public law library and a shared office area for various county staff not permanently located at the courthouse, such as probation officers.

As the years pass, the addition to the Jennings Building will be marked in history books. However,

not as a mere physical addition to an aging building,
but as a new chapter in the county's rich heritage.



The addition to the courthouse upon completion

Photo credits:

The Fairfax Courthouse, 1863 - T.H. O'Sullivan, June 1863
National Archives, copy in Fairfax County Public Library
Archive.

Gazebo and Courthouse, 1920 - FCPL Archive.

Inside the courthouse, 1920s - Lee Hubbard.

Fairfax Clerk's Office, 1928 - Lee Hubbard. This building
was used as the Clerk's Office from 1803 to the Civil War.

Fairfax Clerk's Office, 1920s - Lee Hubbard. This building
was used as the Clerk's Office after the Civil War and was
later used as the Treasurer's Office.

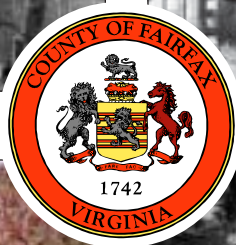
Fairfax Courthouse under restoration, 1966 - Lee Hubbard.

Dedication of the Jennings Judicial Center, 1982 - Staff
photo.

Jennings Judicial Center Courtroom 5E - Staff photo.

The addition to the courthouse upon completion - HDR
Architecture Inc.

*Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs
12000 Government Center Parkway
Suite 551
Fairfax, VA 22035-0065
703-324-3187, TTY 703-324-2935
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/opa
publicaffairs@fairfaxcounty.gov*



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